

President can look at 3,600 pages of appropriations that is hundreds of billions of dollars and go down through that with his ink pen and mark a line through there and say, I don't like this one, I don't like this one, I don't like this one. Now, I think it is appropriate for a President to have that power. The court doesn't necessarily agree with that, I do. And yet to put that responsibility on the President and not demand it for this Congress I think is ducking a duty and responsibility that we have as Members of Congress.

Who in the public, Mr. Speaker, would believe that Congress is just simply powerless to bring up line item votes on the appropriations that we spend in here that, who would understand the fact that the rules were set up in such a way that we don't vote up or down each line item in there. We don't vote up or down each earmark that is in the legislation. We package that up and push it along and essentially vote on it en bloc. Yes, I know those appropriations bills come to the floor under an open rule, at least they generally start under an open rule. But if you turn around once and blink twice, there is a unanimous consent agreement, and then it gets packaged up and it goes under a unanimous consent rule that prohibits the Members from bringing amendments to the legislation that is in front of us, let alone to a line item strike. So, I believe that we should be accountable and responsible for every line in every piece of legislation, whether it is policy or whether it is appropriations.

But on the appropriations, this Congress should have its own line item veto. With that in mind, I have dug through the rules, I have looked at the statutes, and I can figure a way that we can, in very simple language, that we can have a line item veto that is imposed upon this Congress so we have to accept the responsibility that we are charged with constitutionally.

It works like this. It is pretty simple. It is once every quarter, once every 3 months, under an open rule, there would be a bill allowed in order on the floor, a shell bill, if you will, Mr. Speaker, that was under an open rule that would allow any Member to come to the floor and offer an amendment to strike out spending. This is spending that would have already arrived at the President's desk, gotten his signature on it, but spending that hadn't yet been spent. So the appropriations that are in the chute, so to speak, that hadn't been turned out into the expense arena would be the appropriations that we would have a shot at, once a quarter, once every 3 months.

So let's just play this through the mind's eye, Mr. Speaker. Let's say it is the first day of the quarter and the leaders, neither one of them come to the floor to offer the bill that would be the line item cut act bill, which, by the way, that is the name of my bill, the Cut Act, the cut unnecessary tab bill, and any Member can stand up and say,

Mr. Speaker, I have a bill at the desk, and it is in order under the rule. And then the result would be Members would come pouring to the floor with their amendments. One of them would be the bridge to nowhere. One of them would probably be the cowgirl hall of fame, and I get off into some of these things that I don't want to say into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, but they are there. They are line items we have appropriated, some of the earmarks we have appropriated that are downright embarrassing. And those line items would be brought to this floor one bill at a time, or maybe in packages, and we can vote them up or down. We can have a recorded vote on every single line item in an appropriations bill. We could have a recorded vote on every earmark. That would mean that every Member of Congress would be responsible for everything that is in the legislation. We can no longer go home and say, I know I voted for that silly thing but I had to because I needed to have this piece of appropriations that was essential to your district. That money that is going to be spent in your backyard was in the same bill, so I had to vote for the cowgirl's hall of fame or a bridge to nowhere.

Now, this structure of these rules doesn't allow for responsible appropriation. The Cut Act provides for responsible appropriations and it reaches out to the cyberspace modern technological world that we have, because it reaches out and recognizes that we have bloggers out there. We have people that now have instant Internet access to the legislation that we pass, the appropriation bills that we have. I trust the American people to be drilling down into these line items and bringing out those line items that are overspending, that are outrageously blowing the budget, and be able to make an issue of them, carry those issues to us. And we can write them in the form of amendments and bring them to the floor once a quarter and do an act of the Cut Act so we can strike those line items out and be responsible for every single line item in the budget.

I think that does a lot more for the responsibility of this Congress, a lot more to control out-of-control spending. I think it does a lot more for us to step up to our constitutional duties and all the discussions that we have had about how we might define earmarks, because everybody has a different definition of earmarks. But when you put it out here on the floor for a vote, it is "yes" or it is "no." It is a green light or it is a red light, Mr. Speaker. And there is no equivocating on it, unless you want to vote "present," which doesn't work so well in an appropriation bill.

□ 1600

I have introduced the CUT Act. The bill number is H. Res. 776, the Cut the Unnecessary Tab resolution. It's something that has, at least right now, the

support of, in the beginning, 33 Members of Congress. There will be more. I trust they are going to stand up. We are going to ask at some point the Speaker to endorse the kind of a program that will make every Member of Congress responsible for every single line item in the entire appropriations process.

By the way, as I look at this appropriations process, Mr. Speaker, I will submit that we have got to move this system along. Yes, we have passed some appropriation bills here in the House, and we have moved that along pretty well. They are stuck over in the Senate. As I heard from the President last week, there hasn't been a time in history that Congress has delayed so long in getting the appropriations bills to the President's desk. Not one appropriations bill has yet arrived at the President's desk for this fiscal year.

This Congress gaveled in, as I recall, the third day of January 2007. Not one bill has made it from the House, through the Senate, back through conference committee for final passage, and to the White House, to the President's desk for signature. Not one. Not one appropriations bill. There have been a number of others that have.

This puts us in a situation where there is an impending train wreck. This impending train wreck is this: the longer it goes, the closer we get to running out of funds to keep this government running, the closer it comes to the day we will see another 3,600-page omnibus spending bill stacked up in the Senate, stacked up and brought over here and dropped on our desk, well, sent to us by Internet, and be asked to vote again up or down on something we can't measure the contents of.

Again, the political games begin, because that 3,600-page bill that I saw the last time, and it may be bigger or smaller than that, is like a great big accordion. It can have anything in it. Sometimes the staff in the middle of the night puts language in the bill that no Member directed. It's just there. They are just confident that the Member they work for thinks it's a good idea. We don't have a way of knowing.

It comes to the floor; we get a few minutes to debate it, not very many minutes to evaluate it. Even if we did, there's not time to debate all the components of a piece of legislation like that. That is why we have a subcommittee process, the full committee process, the floor debate. That is why we have a bicameral legislature, so it can go over to the Senate and they can do the same thing, the subcommittee, the full committee, the committee, the floor action, and then bring it together in a conference committee. While all this is going on, the public is supposed to be looking at this. We need to ask you for your help out there in America so you can point your fingers back at us.

Mr. Speaker, I point this out because there are 300 million people in America, and it's a huge budget, and the